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ABSTRACT

A panel of 11 human resource development (HRD) practitioners (2 session chairs and 9 panelists) participated in an innovation session devoted to critical thinking in HRD. The session objectives were as follows: (1) share knowledge, views, and beliefs about the relevance of critical management theory and research to the HRD community; (2) provide a forum for HRD researchers interested in undertaking research in the critical tradition of sharing ideas for current and future research; (3) establish a network of critical management researchers in the field of HRD; and (4) provide a forum for additional levels of theoretical and methodological engagement within the Academy of Human Resource Development and to encourage an inclusive spirit. The session chairs opened the session by introducing the historical background and context of critical management studies, what critical management theory means to them, and how it has influenced their research in HRD. Next, each of the panelists shared his or her understanding of critical thinking and its relationship to his/her own research in HRD. The session chairs then opened the debate to the floor and encouraged contributions from all perspectives. Finally, each session chair provided a summary, noting the issues that should be carried forward for future debate in the field. (Contains 8 references.) (MN)

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2002 AHRD Conference

Innovative Session 7

Honolulu, Hawaii

February 27 - March 3, 2002

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Critical Thinking in HRD—A Panel Led Discussion

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The critical management studies (CMS) movement in organisational and management theory has gained momentum over the last 10 years. Through a panel discussion the aim of this session is to present what might be the theoretical and practical implications of a similar movement in HRD research and practice. The session will present challenges to the predominantly performative and learning-outcome focus of the HRD field, and will unpack some of the assumptions behind this orientation.

Keywords: Critical Management Studies, Research and Practice, HRD

What has come to be referred to as the critical management studies movement in organisational and management theory has seen a growth in activity over the last 10 years, but has hitherto not been acknowledged by the mainstream HRD community. It is by no means a unified theoretical movement, indeed its raison d'être might be characterised as a refusal to search for theoretical commensurability. Critical management studies (CMS) therefore attracts scholars from a variety of disciplinary and epistemological positions: post-modern, post-structuralist, labour process and post-Marxist schools, as well as feminist and post colonial researchers and those whose critiques are predominantly influenced by the Frankfurt school of critical theory. Ontological differences exist between researchers working within these traditions, but what they do have in common is a concern to challenge disciplines of management that "are generally understood to be devoted to the (scientific) improvement of managerial practice and the functioning of organizations" (Alvesson & Willmott, 1992: 1). CMS by contrast seeks to question "the wisdom of taking the neutrality or virtue of management as self-evident or unproblematical" (ibid). Those who locate themselves within the CMS field emphasise the necessity of questioning the received wisdom of traditional management knowledge and practices given the influence that managers as a social group exercise.

The increasing number of researchers aligning themselves to the CMS movement is demonstrated by the establishment of its own international conference (these took place in Manchester first in 1999, and again in 2001), in addition to specialist streams within the British Academy of Management, and American Academy of Management annual conferences. The ethos of CMS research now receives wider dispersal through a number of post-graduate and post-experience programmes within the management schools of UK universities. For example, for the past nine years, Lancaster University's Management School has run an Mphil/PhD programme in Critical Management.

We are proposing this innovative session for a number of reasons. We are concerned that the methodological traditions that guide the majority of HRD research do not allow researchers to engage in studies that challenge the predominantly performative and learning-outcome focus of the HRD field. We see evidence for this leading publications and journals as well as in the content of ARHD conference proceedings. We seek to unpick the assumptions behind the performative orientation that dominates much HRD research by exploring with researchers, working in a variety of traditions, whether this tradition is conducive to what we perceive is the greatest tension in HRD, the struggle to reconcile the needs of the individual with the needs of the employing organisation. For example, the emancipatory ideal sometimes touched upon by those interested in individuals' aspirations to find spirituality and meaning at work (e.g. Chalofsky, 2001), challenges the performative view. If we indeed are witnessing a turn towards the sacralisation of work by organisations keen to co-opt the creativity and commitment of individual employees to an even greater degree, how does HRD respond to this?

The traditional methodological frameworks utilised by HRD scholars we argue, cannot adequately assess the impact of these moves upon the individual. We therefore perceive the need to open up HRD theory to a broader range of methodological and theoretical perspectives.

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Session description

We propose a debate on the subject of what we will subsequently refer to as critical thinking, within HRD. A number of international panellists (7) chosen for their "critical" orientations will be invited to make a statement (5 minutes each) about what it means to them to think critically in HRD, and what forms of research this might lead to from their individual perspectives. Following this we will open the debate to the floor, where we hope to stimulate a debate from those holding similar or different perspectives. The two Chairs, who will summarise the debate at the end of the session, will manage the debate.

Chairs

Carole Elliott and Sharon Turnbull, Lancaster University, UK

Panellists

Monica Lee – *Lancaster University, UK*; Linda Perriton – *University of York, UK*; Sandra Watson – *Napier University, Edinburgh, UK*; Jim McGoldrick – *University of Abertay, Dundee, UK*; Jonathan Winterton – *ESC Toulouse, France*; John Truty - *Technical Training Manager, M&M MARS INC, USA.*; Dani Truty - *Northern Illinois University*, USA

Purpose

The purpose of the session is threefold:

- to explore what has hitherto largely been ignored in mainstream HRD research. That is the exploration of research questions through 'critical' research frameworks;
- to broaden the constituency of AHRD, so as to give space to the growing body of researchers in the critical tradition who are undertaking HRD research;
- to provide a forum for a healthy and lively debate on new opportunities for HRD research.

Goals

Our goals for the session are:

- to share knowledge, views, and beliefs about the relevance of critical management theory and research to the HRD community;
- to provide a forum for HRD researchers interested in undertaking research in the critical tradition to share ideas for current and future research;
- to set up a network of critical management researchers in the field of HRD;
- to provide a forum for additional levels of theoretical and methodological engagement within the Academy, and to encourage an inclusive spirit.

Content of the Session

The session Chairs will open the session by introducing the historical background and context of critical management studies, what it means to them, and how it has influenced their research in HRD.

This will be followed by personal contributions from each of the panellists about their own understanding of critical thinking and how they see it relating to their research in HRD.

The session Chairs will then open the debate to the floor where contributions from all perspectives will be encouraged. This discussion will be managed by the joint Chairs who will direct questions to the panellists to stimulate a lively debate which raises important issues.

The Chairs will each provide a summary at the conclusion of the debate, noting the issues that have emerged which will be important to consider and carry forward for future debate in the area.

Depending on the number of people attending the session, the session Chairs may decide to divide the audience into a number of smaller groups to ensure that contributions from as many participants as possible are heard, before reconvening for a plenary discussion.

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At the end of the session participants will be invited to join a network of critical scholars in HRD within the Academy.

Format and Style

To ensure the format and style is an inclusive one, the room will be arranged to allow the audience to see each other at all times and to engage with the panellists; e.g. in a Ushape formation or equivalent. The style will be constructive and encouraging of diversity, with efforts made by the Chairs to ensure the voices of as many participants as possible are heard. The tone of the session will be set by the diversity of views expressed by the panel, correspondingly we hope that this will encourage contributions from audience participants who hold a wide variety of perspectives that may not necessarily concur with those of the Panel or Chairs.

The debate will be intellectually stimulating, as it will take its cue from panellist's contributions around ontology and epistemology, which we believe will stimulate the ongoing debate about the purpose and values of HRD. It will also recognise and accommodate the diverse views of those scholars from non-conventional and international academic backgrounds, and enable us to discuss the dominant prevailing assumptions in the Academy.

The values held by the Chairs of the session are that the Academy should be inclusive and accommodating of diverse ontological and epistemological perspectives. This means that all research perspectives should be recognised and judged according to their intrinsic value if the HRD community of researchers and practitioners is to grow in its reach and strength. Introducing the 'critical' voice into the Academy is not an attempt to subvert past or current research, but instead to broaden our understanding of the issues that face HRD, and to exchange our diverse views within an intellectually stimulating forum so that we continue to be open to learning from each other.

Structure

Introduction by Chairs:	10 minutes
Panelists' comments:	35 minutes
Debate:	35 minutes
Chairs' summaries:	10 minutes.

References

Alvesson, M., & Willmott, H. (eds) (1992). *Critical Management Studies*, Sage: London

Chalofsky, N. (2001). (interviewed by Callahan, J. & Ward, D.) 'A search for meaning: revitalizing the 'human' in human resource development', *HRDI*, 4:2, pp 235-242

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